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Austin Bureau Chief

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# Voter ID problems? Still waiting for the big ones

By Peggy Fikac  
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AUSTIN — Bexar County Elections Administrator Jacquelyn Callanen didn't see many ballots blocked in the primary election by the voter ID law, but one was a heartbreaker.

"There was a senior citizen, a woman. She knew she had to bring a photo of herself. When she came in to vote, her driver license had expired, so she cut her picture out of her driver license and handed her picture to the staff," Callanen said. "Her heart was in the right place. She knew she had to have a photo. And God bless her, she put down this little square thing." When told she needed an approved type of identification, the woman voted with a provisional ballot, but she didn't return with the proper ID to make her vote valid.

"It didn't count," Callanen said. "Those are the kind that break your heart."

The woman's ballot was one of just six provisional ballots due to the voter ID law in Bexar County, where 109,473 votes were cast, said Callanen. In one case, the voter returned with an ID.

Similar smooth sailing was reported by the state and a couple of other large counties with figures at hand Friday despite longstanding concerns by Democrats, civil rights groups and the U.S. Justice Department over the law.

Some credit low turnout and a voter-education push for the relatively few problems. In addition, Texas had a run-through last year with the constitutional amendment election.

The law will get a bigger test in the general election, which will bring a larger group of voters who may not be as familiar with voting laws. The voter ID law is under legal challenge by groups including the Justice Department that say it will hamper voting by Latinos and African Americans.

But the record so far is enough to give some heart elections administrators and to Republicans who defend the law as necessary to prevent voter fraud.

"The predictions of dire consequences of the photo ID law simply did not happen," said Stan Stanart, Harris County clerk and chief elections officer of the county, in a news release touting "Photo ID — Over 99.9% voter compliance."

In Harris County, 193,491 people voted in the March 4 primary. Thirty-five voted provisionally because of the voter ID law, with five of them coming back to fix the problem. In Dallas County, there were 154,875 ballots cast. Thirteen people voted provisionally because of Voter ID, and two of them came back with acceptable IDs.

Statewide, almost 1.9 million people voted. According to the secretary of state's office, 6,774 provisional ballots were cast, but that figure doesn't identify those because of voter ID.

Such figures, however, can't show how many people wanted to vote but were discouraged by ID concerns. "The biggest problem with voter ID is not the problems at the polling place but the discouragement of voters who are confused or afraid they will be turned away never showing up in the first place," said Matt Angle of the pro-Democratic Lone Star Project.

Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer — a San Antonio Democrat who heads the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus, one of the groups suing over the law — said the legal challenge won't turn on primary performance. Among other points, he said the state hasn't done enough to ensure people without IDs are able to get them. State records earlier showed that as many as 795,000 registered voters lack a driver license.

"I don't think this case is going to be tried on anecdotal evidence. It's going to be tried looking at what the state has done, as a matter of public policy, in order to implement a very aggressive and suppressive voter identification law," Martinez Fischer said.

SMU political scientist Cal Jillson said primary voters are highly motivated and thus aren't the best group to use in gauging the law's effect.

"It's those less committed voters, the ones who turn out only occasionally and only in an exciting election, that might get caught without the right papers," he said.


pfikac@express-news.net

Twitter: @pfikac

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